

Harden, John William ^[1]

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by Polly A. Pierce, 1988

22 Aug. 1903–6 Feb. 1985

John William Harden, newspaperman, publicist, and author, was born in Graham, the son of Peter Ray and Nettie Cayce Abbott Harden. Upon graduation from high school he became circulation and advertising manager for the *Burlington Daily Times* as well as news editor for the Graham news department. In 1923 he was classified advertising manager for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, but in the fall entered [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[2]. In Chapel Hill he worked under Bob Madry, head of the university news bureau. Following his graduation in 1927, he joined the *Charlotte News* as a reporter and columnist and in 1937 became news editor of the *Salisbury Evening Post*, where he remained until 1944. Moving to Greensboro, he became executive news editor of the *Daily News* of that city.

In 1944 Harden was named director of public relations in the gubernatorial campaign of [R. Gregg Cherry](#) ^[3]. After Cherry's inauguration, Harden was appointed executive secretary to the governor. While living in Raleigh, he moderated a series of programs on radio station WPTF on "Tales of Tar Heelia." Drawing from his personal file of ghost stories and mysteries, he continued this program for eighteen months during 1946–47. Out of this grew two books, *The Devil's Tramping Ground and Other North Carolina Mysteries* ^[4] (1949) and *Tar Heel Ghosts* ^[5] (1954), both published by [The University of North Carolina Press](#) ^[6].

Resigning his post in the executive office, in 1948 Harden became head of public relations in the reelection campaign of U.S. Senator [William B. Umstead](#) ^[7]. After the election he joined Burlington Mills Corporation as director of public relations and shortly afterwards was made assistant-vice president. Leaving Burlington Mills in 1958, he undertook pioneer work in the state when he formed his own public relations firm, John Harden Associates, in Greensboro. A year later he was engaged by the [North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development](#) ^[8] to lead a tour of North Carolina business and state representatives through western Europe, and in 1971 he assisted [Cannon Mills Company](#) ^[9] of Kannapolis as director of public relations. Harden received wide recognition for his work in public relations. After selling his company in 1981, he continued in an advisory capacity until his death while working at his desk.

On 13 June 1928 Harden married Josephine Holt; they were the parents of Glenn Abbott and John William. Mrs. Harden died in 1951, and two years later he married Sarah Plexico. They were the parents of twin sons, Holmes Plexico and Mark Michael, and of Jonathan Holder.

Harden was a Democrat and an Episcopalian. He worked with the Greensboro Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the Carolina Regional Theater, and the North Carolina Historic Preservation Society. He also served as chairman of the 1951 campaign of the North Carolina League for Crippled Children and in 1955 was president of the General Alumni Association of The University of North Carolina. Harden was also the author of *Alamance County: Economic and Social* ^[10] (1928) and *North Carolina Roads and Their Builders* ^[11] (1966).

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Additional Resources:

John Harden Papers, 1914-1986 (collection no. 04702). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Harden.John.html> ^[12] (accessed March 31, 2014)

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From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[20]

1 January 1988 | Pierce, Polly A.

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